

# GOD'S PROMISE - HOPE

Hebrews 6:13-20 [MW20-16]

Sermon preached by Rev Wayne Thornton, Sunday 26 April 2020

What is a promise?

My *Webster's New World Dictionary* says a promise is:

- a) an agreement to do, or not to do, something
- b) a sign that gives reason for expecting success

Then there is this:

Sam Findley decided it was time to retire from the garment business. So he called in his son Mervyn and gave him the news and a bit of advice: "Son, it's all yours. I've made a success of this business because of two principles: reliability and wisdom. First, take reliability. If you promise goods by the tenth of the month, no matter what happens, you must deliver by the tenth. Even if it costs you overtime, double time, golden time. You deliver what you promise." Mervyn thought about this for a few moments and then asked. "But what about wisdom?" His father shot back: "Wisdom is never making such a stupid promise."

Hebrews 6:13-20 tells us something foundational about the promise God has made us

It begins with Abraham

- Abraham is an important figure for Jews **and** Christians  
Abraham is held up as the prototype of those who trust in God's promise  
Abraham's faith, patience and endurance is the model
- it is assumed that the readers will know the story of Abraham and Isaac  
and that remembering it will do its appropriate work

So just a quick recap to make sure we are all up with the play

- Abraham was around a hundred years old when God promised him a son  
through this son God promised Abraham untold descendants  
Abraham's wife, Sarah, was about 90 when their son, Isaac, was born
- all pretty amazing and miraculous, a very "good news" story  
then some time later, maybe when Isaac is 12 to 14  
God asks Abraham to sacrifice him
- which amazingly, trustingly? Abraham was prepared to do  
but then God recognises Abraham's obedience  
stops him and provides a ram to be sacrificed instead

However even though Abraham is the ancestor of all the faithful

- the model of how to trust in and respond to God  
the most important thing is *not* Abraham's trust and obedience
- first of all is God's Promise  
that's right: God's promise

It is God's promise, and not Abraham's trust and faith, that is the foundation for our hope

- God's promise is first!

God's promise to Abraham was twofold

- multiplying his offspring  
and possession of the land

The writer of Hebrews points out that this promise has unusual significance

- it follows the most severe test of Abraham's faith, the offering of his son Isaac
- Abraham was willing to give up the only possible means for gaining the promise of descendants

So in view of Abraham's trust beyond comprehension

- God undergirds the promise with an oath - a kind of 'double-banger' or 'failsafe' this not to show how amazingly, wonderfully, trustingly faithful Abraham was
- this to further strengthen people's confidence in the dependability of God

To highlight, underline, outline in bold this truth

- God does what is not really necessary
- God guarantees a promise
- God has no need to do this
- it is an accommodation to human need that God guarantees his own promise!

The writer goes on to say: "we have run to God for safety" (verse 18)

- it could be the writer is making a link with the flight of God's people from Egypt or even the ancient custom where people on the run could flee to a place of worship, lay hold of the altar and be safe from pursuers

The writer says that people may have "run" or "fled"

- but they are not scattered as sheep by a wolf, or aimlessly by fear
- rather people move deliberately toward God
- toward the hope lying before them
- this hope is not a subjective quality but an objective reality centered on God through Jesus Christ
- this hope is right in front of those who run to God
- Hebrews 6:19 tells us this hope is a "firm and steady anchor for our souls"

The writer to the Hebrews insists that the Christian possesses the greatest anchor

- the greatest hope in the world
- this hope is in the very presence of God
- in whom is our assurance, and toward whom we move

There are lessons here for us today

- most importantly to be reminded that God is faithful
- Hebrews 6:13-20 says loud and clear, in pulsating orange neon: God is dependable
- God does not abandon
- God does not break promises
- that's point one

Point two is "hope" is not a feeling

- hope is not to do with our posture or thinking about God or about the future in general
- hope is real and certain and complete in itself regardless of what we may happen to think or feel on any given day
- however, however ... the really good news is ... on occasions when we feel there is no hope ...
- hope still exists: wow!

Hebrews 6:13-20 says that even when there is no possible way of seeing anything positive  
- when there is no reason to have even the smallest slightest wavering flicker  
when there is absolutely, positively no sign of hope ...  
HOPE STILL EXISTS  
- that is God's promise

Because it does not depend on us, at all  
- it only depends on God  
and God is totally 100%+ guaranteed faithful!  
- to us living in the situation we have been in, this is really good news

One of my favourite authors, Max Lucado, writes about it like this:  
After 40 years in ministry I've seen a lot of storms. And I've learned that in turbulent times like this, there is nothing more secure than the anchor of God's promises. Hold on tight to these four lifelines – they can withstand the waves of worry and difficulty in your life.

*Hang tight, God gets you!* He's been there. He's been here – and he understands your pain. The stunning idea is simply this: God, for a time, became one of us. If you ever wonder if God listens, he does.

*Overcome Despair with Prayer.* When life overwhelms, pray to the one who is in charge, and know that he is praying for you. Will God do what you ask? Perhaps. Or perhaps he will do more than you imagine. And ponder this truth: Jesus, right now, at this moment, in the midst of whatever trouble you are facing, is speaking on your behalf. He is calling out to the Heavenly Father. He is advocating for a special blessing to be sent your way.

*Pull together when life comes apart.* In times of extreme challenge we can divide or we can unite. One of the beautiful things that can emerge from times of trouble is extravagant compassion and care for our neighbours – crossing lines and building bridges. Our pain bears fruit if it reminds us that everyone has value, and we were created by God, in God's image, for God's glory.

*Evil exists, but it does not win!* Yes, we'd rather have a storm-free life, but we can count on the devil stirring up trouble and fear. Take heart, God has overcome!

Hold fast to these lifelines and ask yourself this key question: Is what I'm anchored to stronger than what I'll go through? Sometimes it may be a calamity that thousands are facing together, or it may be a personal battle that no one else even knows you are dealing with. But God knows. He knows and he cares. And he wants to buoy you in the day-to-day difficulties and guide you home to safe harbour. When the storm hits, anchor to no one but God.

Storms will come. But when they do, filter them through the promises of God. And since his promises are unbreakable, your hope will be unshakable.

Your hope will be unshakable

Hebrews says:

- Fear not  
the anchor is firm
- for it does not depend on us and our world  
it only depends on God  
and God is ... utterly dependable

[So now as we reflect on all this, on God's promise and our hope, we have a version of the hymn: *We Have an Anchor*]